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POSITION AND OPPOSITION

by Felix Morley

From the viewpoint of its inescapable responsibilities, the Republican representation in the 81st Congress got off to an inauspicious start. The split over the chairmanship of its Senate Policy Committee emphasizes the persistence of serious moral weakness in the GOP.

If there is one lesson which the Republican leadership should have learned by this time, it is that the duty of the opposition is to oppose. The position of the opposition must be opposite to the position of the party in power. It may seem childish to reduce political philosophy to such elementary terms. But we must face the fact that never before in American history has political thought sunk to a level as low as that which is accepted today.

In 1936, Governor Landon led a gallant but inexpert fight. In 1948, Governor Dewey was technically expert, as shown by the way he captured the nomination. But gallantry was lacking. The character of his campaign showed everybody that the Republican Party as a whole has ceased to oppose. The bitter truth of that assertion can be demonstrated by a mere summary of the four great issues of the past twelve years. In none of them has the Republican Party fulfilled its function as a fighting opposition.

(1) Should the United States abandon the principles of a Federal Republic to become a strongly-centralized Socialist State?

(2) Did the United States permanently abandon the traditional principle of neutrality when it allied itself with one European dictatorship against another?

(3) Should the United States, having made such an alliance, abide by its choice, or should it now seek to restore its former enemies as potential allies for another war, against its former ally?

(4) If the choice is hostile to Soviet Russia, should the Administration be permitted to play into Communist hands by destroying the free enterprise system, regarded by the Communists themselves as the only effective barrier to their ultimate worldwide victory?

In summary form, those are the four great issues of our day. Every public controversy of the past twelve years falls under one or other of those headings. Every bill on which Congress has voted, every proposition on which editorials have been written, can be card-indexed that simply, though cross-references will sometimes be desirable.

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Of course there is, or has been, room for debate on all these issues. They would not be issues if that were not the case.

But there is no raison d'etre for a political party which is continuously satisfied with taking an equivocal position on fundamental issues. A party exists for the sole purpose of giving organization and voice to the political thought of a section of the people. When a political party ceases to be outspoken, when time and again it fails to voice any clear-cut principle but merely sings the tune of another party in falsetto, then, it has outlived its usefulness.

Even without the repeated endorsement of a majority of the voters it would be incontestable that the Democratic Party stands for certain definite principles of government. Its principles are not the less real because, since the New Deal, they are completely at variance with those for which the Democratic Party used to stand.

Although it still avoids the label, the Democratic Party is now consistently socialistic in its political philosophy. The party leaders maintain that more and more powers traditionally reserved to the states, or to the people, should be assumed by the central government.

The Democratic Party endorses progressive extension of the executive authority and seeks to impose a solution of practically every domestic problem from Washington. Its leadership believes in a centrally planned economy and regards the principle of States' Rights with open aversion and contempt.

In foreign policy the Democratic Party has demonstrated that it believes in intervention, permanent military alliances and, as a natural corollary, peacetime conscription. Under the Roosevelt-Hull leadership the concept of neutrality was completely scrapped in favor of the United Nations. "So Esau despised his birthright." And the value of the mess of pottage received in return is demonstrated by the way we are now forming a military alliance within the United Nations, directed against our great Russian partner in that enterprise.

When events of this character are transpiring; when the fundamental principles of the Republic are undermined in favor of a policy which is not merely inept but also, in the minds of many, un-American, it is the simple duty of the opposition party to confront the issues for what they are. Instead we have the sham and mockery of a "bi-partisan foreign policy" which merely serves to conceal the dangers as the country drifts towards a third World War.

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III

The explanation seems to be that people have been so bemused with words as to be no longer able to discern when a fundamental principle of this Republic is jeopardized. The abuse of language has now been carried to the stage where the advocate of authoritarian government is called a "liberal", while any opponent of militaristic imperialism is likely to be defined as an "isolationist". Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. Certainly the confused jargon which today passes for political thinking represents a collective departure from sanity.

Thus we have the spectacle of a group of Republican Senators, attempting to oust Senator Taft as chairman of the Republican Policy Committee in the Upper House. None of these "Young Turks", as the dissidents call themselves, made any criticism of Taft's ability, integrity or leadership qualifications. They merely agreed that the Senior Senator from Ohio is "too conservative"; that, in the words of Senator Ives: "the party is not going forward under Bob". It would have been more accurate to put the period before the last two words.

There is an unconscious irony in the term "Young Turks", by which these self-styled Republican "liberals" describe themselves. For the actual "Young Turks" had just one objective when they revolted in that country forty years ago. It was to secure for Turkey control over Balkan peoples who were determined not to remain under any kind of Turkish rule. And history shows few failures more complete than that of the Young Turks during the decade when they were in power.

So the Republican "Young Turks" are aptly named. They seek to secure for the GOP the support of voters who have no intention of following any type of Republican leadership. And in chasing a political will-o'-the-wisp they are willing, like their prototypes in Turkey forty years ago, to sacrifice their country for an opportunism which does not even have the merit of being intelligent.

IV

The function of an opposition party is to oppose. And if the Republican Party cannot find ground for intelligent opposition, in the muddled domestic and foreign policies of the present Administration, then it had better make way for a real opposition, possessing at least the moral fortitude to take a stand on principle.

A little more of this "Young Turk" business -- of trying to outdeal the New Deal and of being more socialistic then the Socialists -- and merciful extinction will bring an end to all Republican anxieties.

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The country already has, in Henry Wallace, a political leader who has demonstrated willingness to oppose the Truman Administration from the Left. Mr. Wallace, like Senator Ives, calls himself a liberal and, thanks to the Communists, Mr. Wallace has the nucleus of a permanent, nation-wide organization. If the Progressive Party continues it will certainly in time be taken over by the Communists who directed its 1948 campaign. But that is in any case the fate of a party more "liberal" than the Socialists. There is nothing to the left of the Socialists except Communism.

It is not enough to defeat incipient Republican movements designed to "revitalize" the party by making it more subservient than are the Democrats to well-organized pressure groups. Those Republicans who refuse to regard their party as anti-Socialist, who are unwilling to fight against the ceaseless subjection of the people to centralized dictation, should be expelled. Hugh Scott, the courageous party chairman has again this week properly intimated as much. As Mr. Scott has good reason to realize, the people of the United States are no longer patient with the maneuvering of professional politicians for personal advantage. Too much is at stake. Americans who wish to retain the fundamental principles of the Republic are demanding a party which will fight for their ideals, instead of sabotaging them.

Thanks largely to Governor Thurmond, there is the nucleus of a strong States' Rights party in the South. Its claim to nation-wide consideration is not extinguished by the cheap jibe that racial prejudice is its only stock-in-trade. Thanks largely to Senator Taft, there is also a nucleus of northern Republicanism which takes a stand on principle. Its claim to consideration is not extinguished by Communist-inspired denunciations of the Taft-Hartley Act, parrotted by people who have never even read the provisions of this law.

The crying need of the country now is for an opposition party which will really oppose. Republicans unwilling to do so should be encouraged to join with Mr. Truman or Mr. Wallace, depending on the degree of their "liberalism". There are more than enough traditional Democrats, in Congress and out, to take the place of the faint-hearted who, for twelve years now, have chloroformed the Republican Party and made it a mere political encumbrance.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events January 5, 1949

By Frank C. Hanighen

One of the nightmares which have stayed with us over the past four years concerns the character of Harry Truman. In August, 1945, the President made a tragic decision. No military necessity demanded it; every consideration of humanity should have prevented it. The Japanese Government had virtually been suing for peace for some months; the war with Japan was near its end. Yet Truman recklessly ordered the dropping of the atomic bomb, obliterating the lives of thousands of non-combatants in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Would he do this again?

On New Year's Eve there came to this column a report that the President's attitude has changed in the last three years -- and a new attitude motivated the proposal to send Chief Justice Vinson to Moscow. Why the President wanted to dispatch this mission has been variously explained. Some claim that it was merely an example of naivete in foreign affairs; others, that it was actually a step for appeasement; still others, that he thought he could bully Stalin into appeasing us. Those who deemed it a relaxation of the "tough" policy towards Russia believed that it was intended to win votes away from Henry Wallace. While preserving the suspicion that Truman advisers were moved by the latter motive, we offer a different version of what the President really meant in the Vinson affair.

This is what our informants say. The President has been worried by the prospect of using the atomic weapon. He fully realizes now what he did in 1945; he fears what he might have to do to Russians at some future date. He dreads the day when the admirals and generals might place before him the decision to wipe out the lives of countless Russians and whole industrial areas of the Soviet Union. The prospect, our informants say, keeps him awake of nights. So, in October, he wanted Vinson to tell Stalin to "go slow"; not to do anything which might precipitate outright war; otherwise . . . But the dread alternative was not to be invoked as a mere threat. It was to be a man-to-man appeal for moderation, to prevent a dreadful holocaust. One wonders, hearing this story, whether Mr. Truman really assumed that the Russian dictator could ever understand an American President's Christian scruples. However, even if the story is only true in part, it makes Mr. Truman, not the "little man in the White House", but the big man in a tragic international situation.

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When Chairman Hugh Scott intimated that the "me too"-ers should leave the GOP, he knew he had the support of the rank and file of the Party. After the election a questionnaire was sent out to some 20,000 party workers, county committee chairmen, contributors, etc. Analysis of the replies is now under way at Republican National Headquarters, but a pretty good estimate of the state of mind in Party ranks has been reached. About 70 per cent of the letters blame Dewey's "me too" policy for losing the campaign. Other reasons are cited, but that one is backed by an overwhelming majority of those who answered. Dewey is praised by only a handful of correspondents, but his name is anathema to a very substantial proportion of the writers. Some comments on the Dewey leadership are described as "sulphurous".

This is why the National Committee should reflect a strong drift towards conservatism in the Party, and away from the "me too" tendencies which have obtained such disproportionate publicity in the matter of the "Young Turk" movement in the Senate. If any realistic conclusion can be drawn from the GOP election defeat, it is that the "me too" policy was disastrous. The Taft influence on the conduct of the election campaign was nil, the Dewey-Cabot Lodge "soft" policy was dominant. This leadership, now represented by the "Young Turks", had only itself to blame.

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Hence, according to the perverse logic of wrath, it must, in its frustration, blame those who did not run the show and who advocated a quite different policy. The Young Turk revolt is not a rank-and-file revolt; it is a symptom of the desperate plight of the discredited leaders of the "me too" policy.

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What ideas dominate the thinking of the 81st Congress as it assembles? A fellow reporter covering the House answered "None, and no thinking either". Our colleague seemed justified, the other night, as we listened to the monologue of a prominent House Democrat at a social gathering. The Member, classified as "middle-of-the-road", ferociously attacked what he termed the "unsound concept" of consumer installment-purchase. It all sounded a bit like Union League Club utterances back in the Harding days, when conservatives looked with alarm at the prosperity of the automobile business. However, a few minutes later, the Member proved himself "modern" and "progressive". Referring to the Young Turk development among Republicans, he knowingly reminded us that "you can't buck the tide, you might as well give in to it".

Perhaps, in the end, this attitude will shape the voting, if not the thinking, on taxation. However, as the session opens there do seem to be signs that Members of Congress don't consider the word "profits" as necessarily connoting sin. The Flanders Committee managed to set in circulation the idea that profits are not inconsistent with the Decalogue. We do not know whether or not the highly intelligent presentation of the profits situation by McGraw-Hill Company has had anything to do with this "new look". Certainly that publishing firm, in its series of page ads in newspapers, has offered a lucid explanation of the relation of profits to renewal of plant equipment -- a piece of education much needed.

The effectiveness of such an advertising campaign, however, remains in question. The fact that a "corporation" sponsors the ideas in the ads may compromise the arguments, as the average reader sees them. We recall how several years ago we recommended to a prominent conservative Senator that he disseminate widely an article in the Socialist New Leader, on the grounds that it would carry more conviction than the NAM's propaganda. A New Deal economist, Mr. Wladimir Woytinsky of the Federal Security Board, had brilliantly smothered a Socialist opponent in a controversy in that Socialist periodical -- on the subject of taxes, profits and the conduct of American business. He took the side of business. We thought, innocently, that our conservative friend would delight in quoting the devil's scriptures. But he only blinked suspiciously at ideas which had appeared in -- heavens! -- a Socialist periodical; or perhaps (we are reluctant to say it) at any ideas at all. In this respect, the picture of a conservative Senator isn't much different from that of the new Congress -- "no ideas at all".

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Whenever a great "victory" for "democracy" is announced with fanfare and journalistic trumpets, the chances are excellent that the noise conceals some crashing defeat for the ideas of the Founding Fathers. Those Ancients laid down the rule that treaties should be made with the advice and consent of the Senate. Today, while the Administration is tightening its hold on the House (under the guise of "democracy"), it blithely announces our adhesion to a treaty, without bothering to submit it to the Senate. We refer to the Ruhr agreement creating a council on which the U. S. will have three votes. The British and French Governments will submit this important pact to their respective parliaments. But under our form of "democracy" which has been perverted by the practice of executive agreements, there is a bland assumption, even among Senators, that important foreign pacts need no examination or discussion by the representatives of the people.

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If we did hold such a debate, the manifest unfairness of the Ruhr agreement would become apparent to the public. Suppose, for instance, that the Ford and GM companies were given the majority of representatives on a board to control Chrysler -- or that the states of Illinois, West Virginia and Ohio received a majority to control Pennsylvania. Something like that is what is projected for Germany. Britain, France, the Benelux countries, and the United States have a majority on a board to control the iron and steel industry of the Ruhr -- in effect, power to determine the production and distribution of German economy. Thus competitors are awarded control of German business.

This aspect escaped the notice of the American press during the phoney uproar about the necessity of ensuring French security. And there may be more to it than that. The Economist let the cat out of the bag. The London paper warned that German business might prosper by swamping the peace-goods market which Western Allied industry would lose because it would have to divert much of its production to munitions of war. We doubt that this dread prospect will really come to pass, because there is some phraseology, in the arms sections of the Ruhr pact, which suggests quite a different outcome. Indeed it is quite possible that the Allies are contemplating the use of German industry to provide arms for the projected Western European army. We are prepared to behold, one of these days, the ironic spectacle of the American press hailing the Ruhr as "the arsenal of democracy".

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Felix Morley, in his Analysis on December 22, reminded us of the "age old opposition of the Jewish people to regimentation by any human authority". The Civil Liberties Quarterly (December, 1948) contains an account of this sort of opposition, in a sharp exchange of views between prominent Jews. The New York Board of Rabbis some months ago tried to prevent the U. S. licensing of a British film based on Dickens' Oliver Twist. The Rabbis had objected because they said the delineation of the Fagin character was anti-Semitic. Elmer Rice, prominent playwright and Jewish layman, acting for the Union, protested against the Board's censorship move. Rice argued that minority groups which attempt to suppress matters considered detrimental to their own interests endanger the Bill of Rights for the majority.

Rabbi Lewis, of the Board of Rabbis (according to this organ of the American Civil Liberties Union) replied: "There is a world of difference between a picture and a book. . . . Furthermore, there is no absolute right to freedom of expression. Certainly I was exceedingly happy when Father Coughlin was taken off the radio. . . . I presume if you would have your way, you would not interfere with any anti-Semitic expressions including freedom to study The Merchant of Venice in all the schools, a freedom which I believe should be curbed and suppressed." Rice came back: "There is not much use in continuing our correspondence, since you are either unable or unwilling to see that the restrictions which you advocate, if effectuated by every minority group, would soon put an end to freedom of expression in America. I cannot, however, resist pointing out one of the glaring inconsistencies in your letter. You justify the suppression of Oliver Twist on the ground that there is a great difference between a motion picture and a book. Then, later on in the same letter, you advocate that the study of The Merchant of Venice be 'curbed and suppressed'. What becomes of your distinction? And your statement that there is no absolute right to freedom of expression suggests that you have not familiarized yourself with the Bill of Rights, and with the decisions of the United States Supreme Court -- to say nothing of the spirit of American democracy. I expect to continue to go on defending the rights of minorities, but not to the point where partisan interests are allowed to undermine our basic liberties."

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Book Events

By J. M. Lalley

The publishing year just ended was, considering the volume and variety of books, a disappointing one, although the record of the several years preceding had not encouraged many extravagant hopes.

The trade publishers, with a few noble exceptions, were even less inclined than formerly to risk the publication of any work for which a fair-sized market could not be presumed. A large proportion of the books that got into print showed uniformities of style and arrangement, indicative of the now prevalent practice in publishers' offices of rewriting or extensively revising the author's manuscript. Thus the most conspicuous tendency in letters appeared to be toward a standardized and prefabricated prose of the sort long characteristic of the slick-paper weeklies, whose content is said to be sifted and resifted through a succession of rewriters and editors until it has been sufficiently sterilized and purged of personality to make it palatable to an anonymous and impersonal mass. I dare say this explains why so much of what passes nowadays for imaginative literature has a flavor very similar to that of the bread produced in our hygienic modern bakeries.

The most notable characteristic of the publishing year was the continued proliferation of the war memoirs of politicians, generals, and of the generals' orderlies and secretaries. Only two such books, however, seemed likely to be of great value to the historian: Mr. Churchill's first volume called The Gathering Storm, and Mr. Robert Sherwood's Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History. Of fiction little need be said. The most widely read and publicized American novel was Mr. Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, a tale of war in the South Pacific told with relentless naturalistic detail. Most of the few important novels were importations. From the French came The Transient Hour, by Marcel Ayme, a narrative of Paris under the Nazi occupation; and Bodies and Souls (Corps et Ames) by Maxence van der Meersch, a study of the degradation of medical ethics. From the Italian came Corado Alvaro's Man Is Strong, an ingenious and terrifying study of the psychology of a Police State, which for some reason obtained little attention from American reviewers. From England came Mr. Graham Greene's The Heart of the Matter, which has to do with the damnation of a saint and is, as you can imagine, something of a tour de force; Mr. Evelyn Waugh's The Loved One, a savage satire on the vulgarization of death in a machine-age Society; and Mr. Humphrey Slater's melodramatic Conspirator, which has a topical rather than a purely literary interest, since its chief character is a highborn staff officer who betrays British military secrets to the Kremlin.

The field of poetry remained what it has been for many years, something between an ancient mystery religion and an exclusive and snobbish modern college fraternity. The most notable events perhaps were the appearance of Mr. Allen Tate's Collected Poems, and Mr. T. S. Eliot's polemic against art-for-art's sake called From Poe to Valery. In philosophy, existentialism continued to hold the center of controversy. An excellent survey of the subject by Mr. Ralph Harper appeared. So did a vigorous attack on the whole cult by the celebrated Italian ontologist, Guido de Ruggiero, followed by an attack on Sartre and his school, by the French Thomist, Jacques Maritain. Two books that made a great stir among American readers were Mr. William Vogt's The Road to Survival, and Dr. Fairfield Osborn's Our Plundered Plant. Each had to do with the alarming increase of the world's population and the still more alarming destruction of the means of subsistence. Between them the Messrs. Vogt and Osborn have achieved what appears to be a vigorous revival of the Malthusian gospel.

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